

# ‘Akohekohe

## Crested Honeycreeper (*Palmeria dolei*)

This strikingly beautiful bird dwells in the fog shrouded slopes of Haleakalā. In 1903 the Crested Honeycreeper was reported to be locally abundant on Moloka‘i, where it is now presumed to be extinct.

**DISTRIBUTION:** The Crested Honeycreeper is found from 4,200 to 7,100 feet elevation in ‘ōhi‘a and koa-‘ōhi‘a forests on windward slopes of Haleakalā.

**DESCRIPTION:** The Crested Honeycreeper is 6.5 to 7 inches in length and is the largest of the honeycreepers on Maui. It is mostly black with gray tips on the feathers of the throat and breast, white on the end of the wings and tail, and orange-tipped feathers on the rest of the body. Orange on the nape and sides of the neck forms a collar. Elongated feathers on forehead form a white, gray or golden crest. Sexes are similar. Juveniles are dull brownish black and lack the orange tint and crest.



Male ‘Akohekohe shows his distinctive crest of feathers  
— Photo by Jack Jeffrey

**VOICE:** The song is a low vibrating sound, “hurr hurr - gluk gluk gluk” or “tjook tjook chouroup.” Call notes are an easily imitated clear whistle, “weehee-e” or “tchew” in a descending note.

**NESTING:** Breeding appears to begin in February-March. No nests have been described, although immature birds have been observed with adults in May-August.

**DIET:** Crested Honeycreepers are dominant over ‘Apapane and ‘Iiwi and will aggressively drive off these rivals while feeding on nectar in the crowns of blooming ‘ōhi‘a trees. When nectar is scarce they will feed on insects and fruit, as well as on flowers and fruit of understory plants such as ‘akala.

**CONSERVATION NOTE:** Disturbances to ‘ōhi‘a forest habitat caused by introduced plants and by grazing cattle, pigs, and goats contribute to the decline of this endangered bird. Diseases, such as mosquito-transmitted avian malaria, appear to have taken their toll as well. The population of the Crested Honeycreeper is estimated to be 3,800 birds.

In a cooperative effort, which helped to preserve some essential habitat of this beautiful native bird, more than 5,000 acres of Haleakalā Ranch land was turned over to The Nature Conservancy to manage as the Wai-kamoi Preserve. The contributions of many individuals and organizations helped to raise the funds necessary to purchase the conservation easement. Adjoining Haleakalā National Park, the slopes of this land contain a diverse array of plants and animals, some of which occur nowhere else in the world. As habitat for other endemic land birds, including the endangered Maui Parrotbill, the importance of this nature preserve is recognized nationwide.